

AIDS research funding in Canada: NHRDP responds

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Since 1975 federal support of public health and health services research by the Department of National Health and Welfare (DNHW) has been provided through the National Health Research and Development Program (NHRDP), which has a mandate to stimulate and support research in areas related to national health issues.¹ In the context of this mandate and as part of the federal government's commitment to fighting acquired immunodeficiency syndrome (AIDS) in Canada NHRDP funds research related to human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) and AIDS.

NHRDP began supporting AIDS research in 1983. At that time there were no targeted initiatives; funding for AIDS research was part of NHRDP's regular program and fell within its traditional mandate of public health and health services research.

With the allocation in 1986 of a budget for AIDS research NHRDP established its AIDS Program, with an expanded mandate including funding for research into clinical and biomedical issues as well as some issues related to social sciences. Since then, NHRDP and the Federal Centre for AIDS, Ottawa, have collaborated fully in the development and implementation of all aspects of the AIDS Program. This has allowed direct application of the available funds to the encouragement, development and support of AIDS research in Canada in a timely and proactive manner.

In June 1990 the minister of national health and welfare announced the National AIDS Strategy. The three fundamental goals are (a) to stop the transmission of HIV, (b) to search for effective vaccines, drugs and therapies and (c) to care for, treat and support people infected with HIV and to support their caregivers, families and friends.^{2,3} The broad spectrum of AIDS research activities — biomedical, epidemiologic, clinical, health services, psychosocial and health promotion — supported by NHRDP will contribute directly to the achievement of these goals.

NHRDP has worked with the research community and DNHW to develop competition strategies that meet the needs of both. As a result, NHRDP's AIDS Program currently consists of two

open competitions each year, the submission deadlines being Mar. 15 and Sept. 15. In addition, special competitions in targeted areas, such as the seroprevalence of HIV, are held in response to emerging research priorities.

All applications are evaluated for their scientific merit through rigorous peer review. They are also considered in relation to departmental priorities and are referred to their province of origin for comment. This process, together with the creation of specific training and career awards, has allowed NHRDP to facilitate the rapid development of Canada's AIDS research capability while encouraging and supporting excellence in research.

The success of NHRDP's AIDS Program is apparent from the significant increase in both the number and the type of activities supported and from the growing number of Canadian researchers who are interested in and are carrying out high-quality AIDS research. During the fiscal year 1985-86 NHRDP supported only five AIDS-related research projects, representing six researchers and three provinces. During the year 1990-91 NHRDP supported over 120 projects, representing more than 100 research teams from eight provinces and one of the territories. By Mar. 31, the end of this fiscal year, NHRDP will have contributed over \$30.7 million to AIDS research in Canada.

In keeping with the National AIDS Strategy NHRDP will work actively with MRC and its other federal partners to ensure an optimal federal response to AIDS research in Canada.

References

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